EZRA POUND AND ENGLISH ROMANTICISM

A STUDY IN THE CONCEPT OF TRADITION

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ABSTRACT

The thesis sets out to examine Ezra Pound's attitudes to the English Romantic tradition from its inception to his own time, with a view to discovering whether or not he looks upon it as a healthy or decrepit tradition. His attitudes are contrasted with those of his contemporaries in a study of three pairs of writers; two Romantics, Keats and Byron; two Victorians, Tennyson and Browning; and two Moderns, Eliot and Lawrence. By charting the changes in his outlook over his lifetime, a clear split becomes noticeable between the early apprentice poet and the later mature poet-critic interested in disseminating the knowledge and insights he has collected. The considerable deviance of his opinion from the accepted attitudes of the day demonstrates the consistency and independence of his own concepts.

The conclusion of the thesis is that, in finding the English tradition to be decrepit, Pound does not find the cause to lie in Romanticism. Rather, it is caused by a desertion, or ignorance, of poetic necessities similar to those emphasised by Pound. In other words, his interpretation of literary history is closely tied to, and often stems from, his own poetic requirements.

CHAPTER I

The sheer volume of Pound's writings, and the considerable span of time over which they were produced (more than half a century) makes it impracticable to examine them all in detail. It is necessary to reduce the focus of interest, and consequently it is hoped that by disregarding Pound's poetry it may help to illumine, albeit briefly, some aspects of his prose. The primary area for attention is the group of ideas on tradition, and specifically Pound's concern for tradition as displayed by his 'lists' and his emphasis on certain writers and groups of writers. Of course, such an area also involves the Poundian poetics which determine, and are determined by, the concept of tradition. However, to examine every aspect of tradition is nigh well impossible; it is still too large a topic, so the study has been reduced to an examination of recent English tradition, up to Pound's own time, with a view to seeing if it is satisfactorily incorporated into his own life. I intend, then, to examine Pound's ideas on healthy and decrepit traditions, putting forward Romanticism as an example of the former, and seeing how well it stands up to Pound's criticism, or lack of it. To facilitate this approach three pairs of writers have been selected to represent the general periods of

literature from Romanticism onwards: two Romantics, Keats and Byron; two Victorians, Browning and Tennyson; and two Moderns, Eliot and Lawrence. Obviously there are references to other writers where it is necessary or helpful; in particular to Joyce and the prose tradition.

In order to give a greater understanding of the nature of Pound's concepts, a further section is included. A brief resumé is made of the prevailing critical attitudes of Pound's contemporaries (as far as they can be judged) towards each of the six writers that are dealt with. By observing Pound's divergence from the current critical norms we may see much more precisely how his views are unified and consistent with each other than we could by examining Pound's fulminations on their own. It should soon become evident how essential this perspective is in showing how unaffected Pound was by academic interest in subjects he touched upon. It is necessary also to chart the course of his attitudes throughout his own life-time, since some of them are subject to subtle alteration or extension. We find, for instance, that the 'discovery' of Chinese literature (and Confucian literature, in particular) has a profound effect not just by adding to his available fund of poetic materials but by acting upon the entire structure and organisation of his ideas.

However, before attention can be turned to Pound's criticism of the Romantic tradition, it must be seen in

relation to the whole of his general literary criticism and theory of poetry. While this may not unearth any particularly revealing insights into Poundian criticism in general, it will throw light on the part of the theory we are to examine with relation to the whole body. Therefore, especially those parts of the poetics which impinge on the question of tradition will be discussed as an introduction to the body of the thesis.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

There are a few articles in the Poundian corpus which contain the essence of Pound's critical - and indeed poetic - thought. The great majority of other articles, books and pamphlets are based on the repetition and elaboration of the same principles. For example 'Prolegomena' which appeared in February 1912 in Poetry Review (later Poetry and Drama) states, among other things:

> "I believe that the proper and perfect symbol is the natural object, that if a man uses 'symbols' he must so use them that their symbolic function does not obtrude."

and also that:

> "I believe in technique as the test of a man's sincerity; in law when it is ascertainable."

In the following year in Poetry, edited by Harriet Monroe, under the title 'A Few Don'ts' we come across the caution:

> "Don't use such an expression as 'dim lands of peace'. It dulls the image. It mixes an abstraction with the concrete. It comes from the writer's not realising that the natural object is always the adequate symbol. Go in fear of abstractions."

Both of these articles were subsequently reprinted as 'A Retrospect' which appeared in Pavannes and Divisions in 1918, while the second quotation from 'Prolegomena' is referred to by Pound in Guide to Kulchur in 1938:

> "...my sentence of thirty years ago that technique is the test of a writer's sincerity. The writer or artist who is not 'intolerant of his own defects is a smear'."

The few central articles (such as 'A Retrospect', 'Date Line', 'How to Read', 'I Gather the Limbs of Osiris' and 'The Serious Artist') cover both the art of poetry and the criticism of literature (although it is really the criticism of poetry in particular) and often spill over into a discussion of wider issues; thus we find an excursion into the field of ethics in 'The Serious Artist' upon which much of the essay (which examines the place of literature and the artist in society) is based. Pound, however, is intent on searching out what appears to him to be fundamental to all poetry. By presenting what seems to be universally and eternally significant about the best poetry of the past, he hopes to inspire, or at least lay the groundwork for, good poetry of the future. When he speaks of technique he refers as much to the whole art of poetry:

> in the trampling down of every convention that impedes or obscures the determination of the law, or the precise rendering of the impulse." (1)

He is convinced, indeed, of the possibility of reducing poetry to formulable laws:

> "People regard literature as something vastly more flabby and floating and complicated and indefinite than, let us say, mathematics. Its subject-matter, the human consciousness, is more complicated than are number and space. It is not, however, more complicated than biology, and no-one ever supposed that it was." (2)

This statement echoes many that he made in comparing the arts to mathematics, biology and medicine.

If poetry is a definable substance with ascertainable laws then it follows that, as with the sciences, one can become an expert in the field. In the belief that all modern poets have much to learn from the great writers of the past, Pound searches literary masterpieces for the technical sources of their excellence. "Technique" however, means something more than mere verbal or metrical dexterity; it is "the test of a man's sincerity". (3). Fine writing is therefore no mere end in itself, but a precision instrument for human communication, "a sort of inspired mathematics, which gives us equations ... for

(1) Literary Essays p. 8 (1913)
(2) Literary Essays p.18 (1928)
(3) Literary Essays p. 8 (1912)

human emotions".(4) This is something all poets have to learn. And in order to learn it comprehensively and efficiently, young masters are advised by Pound to undertake voluntary apprenticeship to old masters, "copying masterwork" (in the spirit of apprentice painters) until they are fit to "proceed to their own composition" (5) and metamorphose into modern masters. Nor is it enough to leave off at that point, for "the mastery of an art is the work of a lifetime".(6) In this respect, poetastery and dilettantism are condemned to a low rank while craft and practice are exalted.

The virtues of practice, the need for an apprenticeship and a dedication to study are expressed in an early article on poetics, 'I Gather the Limbs of Osiris', published between December 1911 and February 1912. Here, if the aspiring poet can "get rid of the first verse-froth" which is similar to that of everyone else, and emerge "decently clean", he has "some chance of conserving his will to speak" so that with luck and maturity, "he come upon some lasting excellence".(7) Pound presumably endured the same development though the mellow tone of his pronouncements belies the fact that he was far closer to the beginning than the end of the process himself. Indeed he continues in this professional posture by warning the young

(4) Spirit of Romance p.8 (1910)
(5) Literary Essays p.10 (1912)
(6) ibid p.10 (1912)
(7) Selected Prose p.35 (1911-1912)

poet to conceal his "strained iambics" with their message "that he feels sprightly in spring, is uncomfortable when his sexual desires have not been gratified", and that he has read about human brotherhood "in last year's magazines".(8)

The reason for such arduous preparation is to allow full expression of the individual virtú, by reason of which "we have one Catullus, one Villon".(9) While all souls have much in common, there is "one element which predominates", which is this virtú, and while it is not 'a point of view' nor an 'attitude toward life' nor anything similar, it is "something more substantial which influences all of these" and which Pound illustrates by pointing to certain people who "think with words" or else "with or in objects" while "others realise nothing until they have pictured it".(10) If the poet can survive the discovery of his virtú long enough to put down a "few scant dozen verses" by way of a "reasonable technique" he may attain "mortal immortality".(11) In the same article he depicts the task of the artist as setting down "the pint of truth" that resides within him.

Wherever fine writing and writers existed in the past, Pound finds the same qualities necessary to produce great poetry (and, antithetically, good masters needed to

(8) Selected Prose p.35 (1911-1912)
(9) ibid p. 28
(10) loc.cit p.28
(11) op.cit p.29

possess these qualities in order to be considered good by Pound - vide Milton and Virgil, for example). Also, surprisingly enough, the worst faults of literature of the past are remarkably similar to those of Pound's own time. Could it be that the virtues of the past likewise reflect the tenor of contemporary circumstances?

The main virtues which come to light are clarity and precision of utterance, 'hardness' of style and economy of presentation, all of which are heavily dependent on technical manipulation for their effectiveness. Because knowledge and emotion in a poem should be as concrete and immediate as possible, Pound believes that it is necessary to render them as precisely and neatly as possible, an attitude which directly contradicts Victorian and pre-Raphaelite concepts. It is this which leads to the notion of the Image "which presents an emotional and intellectual complex in an instant of time" and gives a "sense of sudden liberation ... and growth which we experience in the presence of the greatest works of art".(12) It also gives rise to the Vortex, the later dynamic counterpart to the Image.

To emphasise the need for clarity he compares words to cones radiating or absorbing energy, and which it is the poet's job to align correctly since the energy "is the power of tradition, of centuries of race consciousness" and which can only be controlled by the "'Technique of Content'", a matter "which nothing short of genius understands".(13)

(12) Literary Essays p.4 (1913)
(13) Selected Prose p.33 (1911-1912)

But some good poetry is also vague; how does Pound square this difficulty with the principle of clarity? Is it just bad poetry after all? No, life is "made up in great part of things indefinite, impalpable" and thus poetry must not be "stripped of any of its powers of vague suggestion".(14) But Pound's solution is to wax lyrical about the vague possibilities and conclude lamely that "poetry is a very complex art".(15)

Pound is on surer ground when insisting that clarity is a vital condition for certain knowledge. In 'A Retrospect' he distinguishes the troubadours with their "explicit rendering, be it of external nature, or of emotion" and their "eyewitness" descriptions from the Victorians who lived in a "rather blurry, messy sort of a period".(16) The difference is that "one moves the reader only by clarity" because "the durability of the writing depends on the exactitude" which "keeps fresh for the new reader".(17) Ford Madox Ford, when writing on words, noted that the French 'oaken' means 'made of wood' whereas the English equivalent excites such connotations as "stolidity, resolution, honesty" and even "blond hair", and decides that"no English word has clean edges".(18) Pound, in a letter to Harriet Monroe emphasised that "there must be no cliches, set phrases, stereo-typed journalese".(19) The poet must, as one of Pound's book

(14) loc.cit
(15) loc.cit
(16) Literary Essays p.11 (1913)
(17) Literary Essays p.22 (1929)
(18) Critical Writings of Ford Madox Ford p.88
(19) Selected Letters p.49 (1915)

titles suggests Make it New, and in order to ensure that this is accomplished "poetry must be as well written as prose" and only depart therefrom by its "heightened intensity".(20) Hueffer, a novelist, then becomes the oracle to be consulted on such matters for "'Prose' is his own importation. There is no one else with whom one can discuss it".(21)

If poetry is to be as well written as prose (and French scientific prose as Pound once remarked), and "Good writing is writing that is perfectly controlled", then poetry must adopt the same standards as prose. The good writer "uses the smallest number of words" to translate "'Send me the kind of Rembrandt I like'" into the terms of "'Send me four pounds of ten-penny nails'".(22) With simplicity as the keynote, the true poet rises above the false "when he trusts himself to the simplest expression, and when he writes without adjectives".(23) The same sentiment can be found in the central poetic credo:

> "2. To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation." (24)

Hugh Kenner places Pound in the "tradition of tirelessly moral aphoristic wisdom running from Seneca through

(20) Selected Letters p.48 (1915)
(21) 'Ford Madox Hueffer' quoted in Ezra Pound by H.N.Schneidau (L.S.U.P.) 1969 p.11
(22) Literary Essays p.50 (1913)
(23) Spirit of Romance quoted in The Poetry of Ezra Pound Hugh Kenner (Faber 1951) p.59
(24) Literary Essays p.3 (1913)

Montaigne to the French Enlightenment", and "since aphorisms encourage men to enquire further" (25) it must certainly be necessary to secure economy of expression to allow the full transmission of this kind of knowledge.

Exactness or precision can come to mean hardness as opposed to softness, a distinction which Pound elaborates in "The Hard and Soft in French Poetry" (1918).

> "By 'hardness' I mean a quality which is nearly always a virtue - I can think of no case where it is not" (26)

But softness does not suffer an outright condemnation as we would suppose:

> "By softness I mean an opposite quality which is not always a fault" (27)

Perhaps Pound has discovered a flaw in his system and a similar one to that in 'I Gather ... Osiris'; if so, we are illuminated no further, since he attempts only to define hardness.

For a further justification of the importance of careful selection and use of words which he requires, Pound often turns to other fields to find a parallel situation. When he goes to mathematics he points out that $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$ "is the language of philosophy. IT MAKES NO PICTURE" (28) and since he wishes to show the relationship of concrete to

(25) Hugh Kenner The Poetry of Ezra Pound p.45
(26) Literary Essays p.285 (1918)
(27) ibid p.285
(28) Ezra Pound (ed)J.P.Sullivan (Penguin 1965) p.55 (1914)

abstract, he defines it in geometric terms. Here, the original equation he gives is expanded to $(x-a)^2 + (y-b)^2 = z^2$, which "governs the circle. It is the circle ... any circle and all circles".(29) If words conform to this concrete/universal duality, then an essential condition for good poetry has been created.

Yet poetry fulfils another and important function in the state. When it is vital itself, "it does incite humanity to continue living" and provides the mind with "nutrition of impulse".(30) A healthy tradition of literature, we learn, by definition breeds a healthy civilization, because "the word built out of perception of component parts of its meaning reaches down to and through and out into all ethics and politics" so that if we "clean the word" then "health pervades the whole human congeries".(31) The importance of this point to Pound finds expression in several different places, especially in the later writings, such as How to Read where the function of literature in the state "has to do with the clarity and vigour of 'any and every' thought and opinion".(32) If words became inexact, then so does thought, and eventually "the whole machinery of social and individual thought goes to pot".(33) In his more extreme moments - of which there were many - Pound sees usury as the evil ready to destroy the word, and thus civilization as well, for "the word rotted by commerce, affects

(29) J.P.Sullivan (ed) Ezra Pound p.55 (1914)
(30) Literary Essays p.21 (1928)
(31) Polite Essays (1937) p.52
(32) Literary Essays p.21
(33) loc.cit.

us all where we live"(34). So cleanliness of the word, essential to the health of the state, comes from the precision and clarity with which it is used.

The conception of tradition is founded upon Pound's conception of knowledge, since a living tradition keeps important knowledge alive. At the beginning of the ABC of Reading he quotes the parable of Agassiz and the fish as an example of the kind of knowledge he has in mind, the point of the parable being that a graduate student only learns the true (i.e. non-academic) nature of the fish when it finally reaches "an advanced state of decomposition". (35) Knowledge to Pound is principally the marshalling and manipulation of key facts, since "certain facts give one a sudden insight into circumadjacent conditions", and he cites the Venetian refusal to fight the Milanese, because it was profitless to both, as "a portent" where "the old order changes", and "the Middle Ages imperceptibly give ground to the Renaissance".(36) Such facts are "interpreting detail", which although they are hard to find "are swift and easy of transmission. They govern knowledge as the switchboard governs an electric circuit".(37) In the same way a Russian correspondent once saw that Pound was, in effect, trying to "give people new eyes, not to make them see any particular new thing".(38) This idea was buttressed by Fenollosa who compared European logic to a brickyard where each concept acts as a baked brick which is packed by its label

(34) Polite Essays p.53 (1937)
(35) ABC of Reading p.2
(36) Selected Prose p.22 (1911-1912)
(37) loc.cit.
(38) Gaudier-Brzeska: A Portrait p.95

into "a sort of wall called a sentence".(39)

In literature, new knowledge must be encompassed by a growth of technique, so that fresh experience can become part of the known order. Thus "we advance by discriminations"(40), and the artist's discovery must be so efficiently expressed that "one cannot resay it more effectively"; he must, in fact, have achieved "'maximum efficiency of expression'".(41) Pound takes up many essays, especially on the troubadours, attempting to define precisely what each poet has added to literature. So we find that Arnaut Daniel "discriminated between rhyme and rhythm", and that the beauty of line-endings came "not upon frequency, but upon their action, the one upon the other".(42)

Literary tradition in Pound's eyes, is a massive concept spanning all cultures and the whole of human history, but it still depends on the advancement of technique. When Pound speaks, in the Spirit of Romance of literary scholarship, he wants something which will take account of the scope of history, and

> "which will weigh Theocritus and Yeats with one balance, and will judge dead men as inexorably as dull writers of today" (43)

It is this principle of differentiation which he adopts himself, regardless of racial, historical or lingual

(39) Instigations of Ezra Pound p.380
(40) Selected Prose p.26 (1911-1912)
(41) loc.cit.
(42) op.cit. p.26
(43) Spirit of Romance p.8

dissimilarities. The purpose in sifting the interesting from the dull literature is to discover the living, continuing tradition at the end of which Pound sees himself standing at the end of. Thus, when we come across an essay entitled 'Tradition' we are not disappointed to find that it refers to a living tradition, as announced by the clarion call of the first sentence:

> "The tradition is a beauty which we preserve and not a set of fetters to bind us" (44)

Very often the business of sorting out the good from the bad becomes incorporated into exhorting the reader as to what he ought or ought not to read. This process led initially to the publication of How to Read, and after an uncomprehending public response, to the ABC of Reading which sets out the notorious lists of good authors. Yet the lists had appeared much earlier in an abbreviated form; for example, in a letter to Iris Barry in June 1916, and in 'The Renaissance' in 1914.

On the subject of decrepit tradition, Pound finds the enemy to be rhetoric, and is quick to point out its horrible effect; civilization crumbles. The issue is clearly stated in Polite Essays:

> "When literature is not active; when the word is not constantly striving towards precision, the nation decays in its head"(45)

(44) Literary Essays p.91 (1913)
(45) Polite Essays (1937) p.5

He pinpoints an example of this decay in Renaissance Italy which was "destroyed by the periodic sentence and by the flowing paragraph as the Roman Empire had been destroyed before her"(46). The lesson to be learnt is that "when words cease to cling close to things, kingdoms fall, empires wane and dimish" (47) and the man who was responsible was Quintillian who "'did' for the direct sentence" (48). Early twentieth-century England seemed to Pound to contain all the same literary elements as those of decadent Rome (or perhaps decadent Rome contained all the elements of contemporary England). Therefore the job confronting Pound and his colleagues was literally to stop the rot, and for Pound at least, to begin the New Paideuma, based on his reading of literary history to restore precision and sanity to letters and society.

But where did the English decay begin? Pound asserts that "the decline of England began the day when Landor packed his trunks and departed to Tuscany".(49) Elsewhere he seems uncertain for although "we have the good Elizabethan; which is not wholly unChaucerian; and the bad, or muzzy, Elizabethan", we have also had "the Miltonic, which is a bombastic and rhetorical Elizabethan"(50). So perhaps Milton is the cause of it all, for he "is the worst sort of poison. He is a thorough-going decadent in the worst sense of the term"(51). At any rate, a loss of contact with the

(46) Gaudier-Brzeska: A Portrait quoted in Hugh Kenner's The Poetry of Ezra Pound p.43
(47) loc.cit
(48) ibid p.44
(49) Literary Essays p.32 (1929)
(50) Literary Essays p.287 (1918)
(51) Literary Essays p.216 (1913)

Continent from approximately 1800 onwards was the material cause, for "no more Voltaires came over to admire la Grande Nation and study English authors" (52). However, no reason is supplied as to why England should be cast adrift, nor why it should happen at that time. Why was she 'unable' to hold her best authors (assuming, of course, that Pound's choices were all the best ones)? Apparently it just happens, although in some of his later writings Pound ascribes it to the inevitable economic motive.

So it is plain that the Romantics and their successors stand right in the middle of a supposedly dying tradition. The requirements which Pound sees as fundamental to literature (precision, clarity, economy and so forth) are, according to him, sharply on the decline, and as a consequence not only literary matters, but the health of the entire country must likewise decline. This, then, is our problem; is Romanticism a healthy tradition, or can it be justified as such? If it cannot be, then what does this tell us about Pound, his method of scholarship and his relationship to his own age? It is within this context that the following test-cases of Romanticism lie.

(52) Guide to Kulchur (1938) p.227

CHAPTER II

THE ROMANTICS: KEATS AND BYRON

(i) REPUTATION

While it might be thought desirable to define who or what is covered by the term 'Romanticism', literary history has shown only too clearly the confusions and contradictions that arise from attempts to do so. Ernest Bernbaum, for instance, in Guide through the Romantic Movement sets out a long list of possible and conflicting definitions, which simply illustrates the variety rather than the unity of the attempted delineations. For our purpose it is more important to examine results and repercussions where appropriate, and to draw conclusions where necessary, than to attempt a cohesive definition.

The period of critical opinion under consideration is not intended to be a clearly definable one, since we are only concerned with the most general trends and attitudes which would have come to Pound's attention. Thus, a span covering the years from approximately the turn of the century to the mid-1930's at the latest is all that is dealt with. Before this time Pound was too young to have

followed the changes of critical taste, and by 1930 he had been out of the intellectual milieu of London for ten years, and central Europe for six. This is clearly reflected in his writings which show no recognition of new schools of poetry (such as the Surrealists and Social Realists) or even of individual writers (e.g. Dylan Thomas). Therefore it is reasonable to assume that he was equally out of touch with current critical speculations. Indeed, in this respect, Eliot finally refused to publish his articles in The Criterion because of their waywardness.

Between the turn of the century and the Second World War the Romantics have suffered sorely at the hands of two main groups; the Humanists and the New Critics. While there were other shades of opinion to be noted, they were not nearly so dominant or voluble, and tended not to fall into the centre of the critical fracas.

The Humanists, or neo-Humanists, led by Paul Elmer More and Irving Babbitt, were the first to attack the generally favourable view of the Romantics, mostly by way of essays, pamphlets and articles rather than by complete books. Romanticism, as More described it in the Shelburne Essays, VIII (1913), was "the illusion of beholding the infinite within the stream of nature itself, instead of apart from that stream" - an indictment that was repeated in Babbitt's Rousseau and Romanticism (1919). Ernest Bernbaum tells us that Babbitt insisted that the Romantics' worst characteristic was:

> "the glorification of an uncritical, irresponsible aesthetic, and centrifugal imagination, uncontrolled by reason or good sense, and encouraging man's impulsive egotism and wishful illusions." (1)

He also accused the Romantics of weakening the 'inner check' and thereby allowing the will free reign.

Of course, the Humanists were not left free to trample unchecked over Romanticism, and powerful defences from scholars such as Herford, Fausset and Hyde, who, arguing from a sounder knowledge of Romanticism and with wider historical, aesthetic and ethical perspectives (for example, linking Humanism with discredited neo-classical contemporaries of the Romantics) largely demolished the Humanist objections.

However, if disciples of the Romantic movement felt that the battle had been won, and that they were free to bask again in the sunshine of Romantic pleasures, then they reckoned without the fresh onslaught of the New Critics. This group, which later included the Southern Agrarians, continued a much more widespread and sustained assault against the Romantics than their predecessors. Shelley and Wordsworth formed the main targets for their criticism, although Coleridge came under fire whilst his best ideas were distorted and converted to the New Critics' own uses. Ernest Bernbaum writes of them:

(1) The English Romantic Poets ed E. Bernbaum(MLA 1956) p.29

> "they assert that romantic literature as a whole (including Shakespeare) is too emotional, too soft ... too hopeful that the good in man's nature may overcome the evil, too desirous of simplifying human experience into intelligible designs ... and above all, too certain that Imagination, co-operating with Reason, could reveal such truths through the Beautiful." (2)

The first shots were fired in 1924 by T.E. Hulme with Speculations when he announced that he objected to even the best of Romantics. He contrasts classical and imagist theories of poetry with the Romantic output, to the detriment of the Romantics:

> "I object to the sloppiness which doesn't consider that a poem is a poem unless it is moaning or whining about something or other ... The thing has got so bad now that a poem which is all dry and hard, a properly classical poem, would not be considered at all." (3)

Later, he makes his famous pronouncement:

> "I prophesy that a period of dry, hard, classical verse is coming." (4)

When Richard H. Fogle says of Hulme:

> "His attitude towards the Romantics, for example, his love of definiteness and concreteness in imagery, and his desire for 'a period of dry, hard, classical verse', are all apparent in the essays of T.S. Eliot." (5)

he is noting an often-recognised similarity between the

(2) The English Romantic Poets ed E.Bernbaum p.31
(3) RH Fogle "Romantic Bards and Reviewers" in English Literary History XII, 3,Sept.1945, p.222
(4) TE Hulme Speculations(London and New York 1924) p.133
(5) RH Fogle "Romantic Bards and Reviewers" ELH p.224

two figures. Although Eliot's views were largely formed before the appearance of Hulme's book, there is little doubt that they would have been strengthened by it. His attitude towards the Romantics, for instance, is clearly set out in The Sacred Wood (1920):

> "... the only cure for Romanticism is to analyze it. What is permanent and good in Romanticism is curiosity ... there may be a good deal to be said for Romanticism in life, but there is no place for it in letters." (6)

The narrowness of definition was bolstered by the theories of I.A. Richards (especially the Principles of Literary Criticism (1924)) and colleagues such as Ogden and Wood, and the movement spread with the support of the Southern Agrarians (principally John Crowe Ransom and Allen Tate)) and the influence of critics such as Empson, Cleanth Brooks and even Leavis. The reaction to their encroachment upon literary territory gathered force outside our period, in the middle and late 1930's, and onwards, and need not concern us.

Keats' reputation has fluctuated very slightly in both critical and general opinion since the turn of the century, and has, if anything, become more resplendent as the mutterings of detractors were suffocated beneath a growing acclaim. There has, though, been a noticeable shift of emphasis away from belletristic and appreciative essays to a more scholarly and academic approach.

(6) TS Eliot The Sacred Wood (London 1920) pp.31-32

Late Victorian writers were generally appreciative of Keats' ability, with the exception of disciples of the Arnoldian school, who saw Keats dwelling unnecessarily and ineffectually in luxuria. But writers such as Crosse, Symons, Woodberry, Binyon, Bridges and others held a favourable opinion.

At the turn of the century there was little doubt that Keats was regarded as a major poet, which made his work available for academic research, and led to the publication of much new information about him. Continental writers, too, started to take a considerable interest in his poetry. Periodicals from Bookman, TLS, PMLA and Englische Studien to the more popular Nineteenth Century and McLure's Magazine also began to print articles about him. A Shelley-Keats house was erected in 1909 in Italy and prestigious patrons (King Edward VII among them) showed enthusiasm towards his verse.

In 1921, on the centenary of Keats' death, there was a plenitude of appreciative articles and paeons of praise, especially from the Continent. Since then, critics such as Amy Lowell, Masefield, A.C. Bradley, F.R. Leavis, Allen Tate and Cleanth Brooks have all shown favour towards his writings. Even T.S. Eliot, who is 'not happy about Hyperion', and who omits to praise Keats as a poet, says of his letters:

> "There is hardly one statement of Keats' about poetry, which, when considered carefully and with due allowance for the difficulty of communication, will not be found to be true."(7)

Criticism of Byron has undoubtedly been swamped by the unusual interest in his personal affairs, and to some degree with the question of his sanity, a discussion which was re-ignited by the publication of Astarte in 1905, and again in 1921 by Byron's grandson, the Earl of Lovelace. Apart from this, in the early years of the twentieth century there is a generally favourable, if cautious, assessment of his poetic achievements which gave way to a growing enthusiasm. We find this appreciation in J.F.A. Pyre's article, for instance, in 1907 in the Atlantic Monthly and from A.A. Symons in the Romantic Movement in English Poetry (1909). In 1910, the editor of the Encyclopedia Britannica attempted to explain why Byron had failed to retain his original and once powerful hold on English Literature, but concluded that his unorthodoxy was no longer considered alarming. In the same year, W.J.Courthope, in the History of English Poetry noted the two predominant aspects of Byron as his intense self-consciousness and his imaginative expression of the society about him. Also in 1910, the University College of Nottingham founded a Byron Chair. In 1912 Oliver Elton in his Survey of English Literature speaks of Byron as an 'inspiration and a living-force' but muses on the decline of Byron's reputation.

(7) T.S. Eliot The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism Harvard 1933.

Throughout this period, too, there was an increase in minor Byroniana, from appreciative articles to items of interest, while the London Stage Society performed Manfred in 1918. Nottingham lectures by Marie Corelli (1915) and Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch (1918) were both enthusiastic, as was H.J.C. Grierson's 'Wharton Lecture' of 1920. In the centenary year of his death, 1924, S.C. Chew produced Byron in England, a survey of his reputation to date, and E. Prothero produced a judicious but favourable centenary article.

Since then, there has been a continual, if not heated interest in Byron although he had become a suitable subject for academic research. W.J. Colbert produced his weighty Byron: Romantic Paradox in 1935, while T.S. Eliot in 1937 decided that he had only a 'schoolboy command of the language', which Cottrall answered in Byron and the Colloquial Tradition in English Poetry in 1939, when he insisted upon Byron's command of 'the whole rhythmic potentiality of colloquial English'.

(ii) POUND'S VIEWS

No doubt the popular, sentimentalist vision of a pale and delicate Keats would have repelled Pound; certainly his own emphases lie on an altogether different plane, and of one thing he is quite certain:

> ''that the decline of England began on the day when Landor packed his trunks and departed

> to Tuscany. Up till then England had been able to contain her best authors; after that we see Shelley, Keats, Byron, Beddoes on the Continent ..." (8)

This theme appears three times in Pound's works, restated in similar terms.

> "III. The period when England no longer had room for, or welcomed her own best writers.
>
> Landor in Italy
> Beddoes in Germany
> Byron, Shelley, Keats in Italy
> Browning in Italy, Tennyson the official literature of England." (9)

And, when he wishes to buttress his view of the efficiency and desirability of despotic rule, he writes:

> "A totalitarian state uses the best of its human components. Shakespeare and Chaucer did not think of emigrating. Landor, Shelley, Keats, Browning, Beddoes did emigrate, and Bobby Burns thought of it. Something had happened in and to England," (10)

But Pound does possess an admiration for Keats, as we discover in this early reference:

> "But let a man once convince thirty people that he has some chance of finding ... some entanglement of words so subtle, so crafty that they can be read or heard without yawning, after the reading of Pindar and Meleager ... and of a passage from John Keats ... (and he) will find friendship where he little expected it, and delightful things will befall him suddenly."(11)

Although it seems that Pound's admiration for Keats is based on technical grounds, and that he believes him to

(8) Literary Essays p.32 (1929)
(9) ABC of Reading (1934) p.118
(10) Selected Prose p.128 (1937-1938)
(11) ibid p.35 (1911-1912)

have had a lyric gift, Keats is never mentioned as recommended reading. The reason is soon made clear:

> "Since Lamb and his contemporary critics everything has been based, and absurdly based on the Elizabethans, who are a pastiche. They are neither very intense nor very accomplished ... Or let us say that Keats did the last possible rehash of Elizabethanism." (12)

The difficulty is that Keats is writing in a polluted tradition, a fact which Pound is anxious to impress upon us:

> "And we have Landor - that is, Landor at his best. And after that we have 'isms' and 'eses': the pseudo-Elizabethanism - i.e. bad Keats: the romantics, Swinburnese, Browningese, neo-celticism." (13)

The evidence for Pound, at least in part, that the tradition was fouled lies in the departure of the best poets, the Romantics, to the Continent. Conversely, the evidence that they were not good enough poets to be included as essential reading is that they were working in a polluted tradition. However, the implication with Keats, and perhaps others, is that he died before he was able to accomplish any notable literary advances. His achievement, in Pound's eyes, was to start the renovation of poetry by an insight:

> "Swinburne recognised poetry as an art; and as an art of verbal music. Keats got so far as to see that it need not be the pack-mule of philosophy." (14)

(12) Literary Essays p.216 (1915)
(13) Literary Essays p.287 (1918)
(14) ibid p.292 (1918)

Pound seems particularly impressed by Keats' lyricism and his evocation of beauty which leads to a favourable comparison in the Spirit of Romance in the essay on Camoens:

> "Those who enjoy the submarine parts of Keats' Endymion will probably enjoy, for contrast and comparison, that part of the sixth canto of Os Lusiadas which treats of Bacchus' visit to Neptune." (15)

Indeed, Keats' importance to Pound seems to centre upon this little-articulated concept of beauty. Noel Stock, writing of an early article ('M. Antonius Flaminius and John Keats: A Kinship in Genius,' 1908) tells us that he asks: "What is beauty ... and where shall one lay hold of it?" (16) The same sentiment appears again in the last of the critical works:

> "A national dividend, distributive economics, the obliteration of snobism, Averroes, Avicenna, a beauty of philosophical writing ... a thousand mosques that Keats couldn't have overdescribed; a sense of man and human dignity yet unobliterated." (17)

It seems to be this quality of sensuousness which Pound admires, and to which he often returns.

Byron attracts two main comments from Pound. The first is straightforward, as he writes to Iris Barry in 1916: "Byron's technique is rotten" (18), and which he repeats in the ABC of Reading: "Try to find a poem of Byron

(15) Spirit of Romance (1910) p.219
(16) Noel Stock The Life of Ezra Pound (RKP 1970) p.56
(17) Guide to Kulchur (1938) p.53
(18) Selected Letters p.90

or Poe without seven serious defects." (19) This is sometimes combined with the second observation, which illustrates Pound's whole attitude towards Byron:

> "Byron rather more snap, a good satirist and a loose writer." (20)

In fact, Pound showed some interest in Byron for his satiric ability mainly because of Pound's aspirations of his own on the same score. In this respect, Byron comes close to being treated as a master to whom Pound is an apprentice:

> "Note that the guts of all satire, (Don Juan, for instance) are in the digressions, à propos des bottes, and that a Don Juan canto is about the shortest length convenient for such digression ... My business instinct such as it is, makes me think the most advantageous thing all round would be to boom it as THE satire, "best since Byron" ... it is not such an awful lie, if one considers that nobody has written satire, in the best English iambic tradition since God knows when." (21)

Pound is careful to distinguish with the rest of Byron's work that loose writing does not necessarily mean that all hope of quality is destroyed. On the contrary, he quotes Sir Thomas Beecham on the musical nature of Byron's verse with enthusiasm:

> '"there is more for a musician in a few lines with something rough or uneven, such as Byron's
>
> There be none of Beauty's daughters
>
> With a magic like thee,
>
> than in whole pages of regular poetry"' (22)

(19) ABC of Reading (1934) p.64
(20) Selected Letters p.134
(21) Selected Letters p.58
(22) Literary Essays p.422 (1917)

And he notes in Kulchur that the "neatness and slickness of a Samuel J. or Alex Pope" cannot be incorporated "into Byronic slapdash and keep the quality that made Don Juan"(23). But when Byron is wrongly credited with some innovation, Pound is quick to pounce:

> "I am against ... the insularity which credits Byron with having invented a kind of writing that had been used by Pulci." (24)

He was also well aware of the public adulation of Byron:

> "Oh well! Byron enjoyed him (Crabbe). And the people liked Byron. They liked him for being 'romantic' ... They adored Mrs Hemans." (25)

In short, Pound was quite favourably impressed by Byron, with the reservation that his writing was careless: altogether a generous opinion for a man who laid such emphasis upon craftmanship and technical control. Byron, does not, however, figure in the lists, and is despatched with his fellow Romantics to the Continent, presumably suffering from the same taint of tradition that had adhered to Keats.

We may easily dispose of some of the other leading Romantics, because Pound's attitude towards them was relatively uncomplicated. Coleridge is dealt with in an extraordinarily simple fashion by Pound, who never even mentions his poetry, and refers only to his criticism, and

(23) Guide to Kulchur (1938) p.184
(24) Selected Prose p.109 (1938)
(25) Literary Essays p.279 (1917)

then only to two observations which Pound never seems to tire of repeating. Thus we find in the Spirit of Romance:

> "Coleridge says, with truth: 'Our genuine admiration of a great poet is for a continuous undercurrent of feeling; it is everywhere present, but seldom anywhere a separate excitement.'" (26)

He not only repeats the remark later on (p.143) in the same book, but also in an almost similar form in 'Remy de Gourmont' and Patria Mia. The other remark he cites in 'The Prose Tradition in Verse', in Poetry in 1914:

> "Coleridge has spoken of 'the miracle that might be wrought more simply by one man's feeling a thing more clearly or more poignantly than anyone had felt it before.'"(27)

and again in 'Hudson: Poet Strayed into Science', published in the Little Review in 1920.

We find Pound's opinion of Wordsworth expressed shortly in the ABC of Reading:

> "Wordsworth got rid of a lot of trimmings, but there are vast stretches of deadness in his writing ... Wordsworth vibrates to a limited range of stimuli, and he was not conscious of the full problem of writing." (28)

Pound constantly differentiates between the occasional fine phrase or line he discovers and what he calls the "meaning of Wordsworth." (29) In fact, the more usual description

(26) Spirit of Romance (1910) p.50
(27) Literary Essays p.313 (1918)
(28) ABC of Reading (1934) p.57
(29) Pound-Joyce ed Forrest Read (Faber 1967) p.278

of him is as a sheep; for instance, in Pound's attribution to him of the qualities of imagism:

> "He was a silly old sheep with a genius, an unquestionable genius for imagism, for a presentation of natural detail ... and this talent ... he buried in a desert of bleatings."(30)

Yet Wordsworth's apparent dullness often leads Pound to the edge of abuse, especially with regard to his love for nature:

> "It took the donkey-eared Milton to pass on that drivelling imbecility about woodnotes so dear to the Wordsworthian epiglottis." (31)

Wordsworth's problem, according to Pound, was that he "was so busied about the ordinary word that he never found time to think about le mot juste"(32) and that therefore this produced his "endless maunderings" (33) about nature. On the other hand, Pound recognised that a gift similar to this might be the first step to a satisfactory translation of Dante, "a concise and luminous style equal to Wordsworth at his best." (34)

Of Shelley, Pound has few things to say. He particularly admired the fifth act of The Cenci and Ode to the West Wind; at the other end of the scale we find: "Shelley's Sensitive Plant is one of the rottenest poems ever written." (35). He draws a lengthy parallel between Dante and

(30) Literary Essays p.277 (1917)
(31) ibid p.72 (1934)
(32) ibid p.373 (1914)
(33) Selected Letters p.90
(34) Spirit of Romance (1910) p.144
(35) Literary Essays p.51

Shelley in the Spirit of Romance, later reprinted in Polite Essays and declares that "Shelley resembles Dante afar off, and in a certain effect of clear light which they both possess." (36) In a rather odd attempt at praise he writes: "Shelley, I believe, ranks highest as the English 'transcendental' poet, whatever that may mean". (37) He also admires Shelley's clear-sightedness when he speaks of:

> "Shelley, Yeats, Swinburne with their 'unacknowledged legislators' ... have shown their very just appreciation of the system of echoes, and general vacuity of public opinion." (38)

(iii) COMPARISONS AND COMMENTARY

Pound's ideas on the Romantics differ, as we can see, quite considerably from those of his contemporaries. Where he praises Keats' sensuousness, this quality draws criticism from other commentators, as does 'the holiness of the Heart's imagination'. The only point of agreement is on the elaborateness and luxuriance of the language, but with differing ascriptions as to the causes; to the general run of critics it is only Keats himself who is at fault, but to Pound it is sound evidence of the decay of tradition.

Pound's treatment of Keats falls into two categories. Before the 1930's, he considers Keats as separate from the other Romantics and notes in particular his craftmanship and technique; qualities which Pound was especially anxious

(36) Spirit of Romance (1910) pp.155-6
(37) Loc.cit
(38) Literary Essays p.371 (1914)

to attain himself. Since the articles which contain these remarks (such as 'I Gather ... Osiris' and 'The Renaissance') were all written before 1920, i.e. the period of the early poetry, it throws a light on the apprentice Pound searching another writer for methods of composition. With the publication of A Draft of XVI Cantos in 1925, much of his concern with technique seems to die away - as we see in the references to Keats. In the 1930's, however, there appears a new centre of interest. Keats appears firmly as a part of tradition and is three times consigned to the Continent with his fellows (in How to Read, The Jefferson-Adams Letters and ABC of Reading) as proof of European 'purity' and vitality over English decrepitude in letters. More importantly, we can see Pound re-arranging tradition around himself, by showing that language is diseased and that it needs someone like him (and a foreigner - Englishmen had failed and fled) to remedy the situation in the face of the oncoming desuetude. A later idea, linked with his growing economic obsessions, was to claim that previous poets only existed - and therefore present ones will only exist - when a totalitarian Government holds power:

> "A totalitarian state uses the best of its human components. Shakespeare and Chaucer did not think of emigrating." (39)

Such a claim, of course, has to ignore the fact that Shakespeare and Chaucer did not live under a totalitarian state, and also ignore the vast numbers of writers who did

(39) Selected Prose p.128 (1937-38)

stay in England (e.g. Wordsworth, Beddoes, Swinburne and Arnold). Incidentally, Pound by his own admission is elevated to one of the best components.

Another pre-occupation of Pound's lies in a further reference to Keats:

> "Incredible as it now seems, the bad critics of Keats' time found his writing "obscure", which meant they couldn't understand WHY Keats wrote." (40)

This observation suggests a parallel to Pound's own situation; if bad critics found Keats obscure in his time, and critics find Pound obscure in his time, then (a) critics of Pound have once again proved their ineptitude as they did with Keats, and may thus be ignored, and (b) Pound is a gifted man with perceptions not granted to the ordinary man. When we remember that Pound was under fire at the time (1934) as to the complexities of the Cantos (forty-one had been published so far), and to the wrong-headedness of How to Read, it seems possible that Pound was insulating himself from criticism by finding analogies in older writers.

Byron may be dealt with far more briefly, since many of the same themes are found in relation to him as they were to Keats. We have already noted Pound's comments on the public fascination with Byron's private life, and we have seen that Pound's attention circles about the satirical elements of Byron's writing and is only minimally attracted to his other work. The satirical concern dies away after 1918,

(40) ABC of Reading (1934) p.48

with the publication of L'Homme Moyen Sensuel, leaving only Pound's objection to Byron as a careless writer as a very minor technical aspect. It is minor because Pound barely mentions Byron's looseness of style thereafter, but (as with Keats) concentrates on his place in tradition. Byron, as with Keats, joins the Romantic crowd on the Continent, thereby leaving the English tradition to decay. Naturally he does not figure in the 'lists' because of his slapdash approach but Pound is unwilling to dismiss him out of hand because he is a 'good' writer, and, as he mentions paradoxically, that Don Juan has a quality gained only through hasty construction. We saw above, though, (page 31) that he will not credit Byron with innovations which he believes are due elsewhere. In other words, he seems to relegate Byron to a fairly minor position as a writer despite our knowledge of Byron's enormous impact in England when he was on the Continent. This leads us to a difficulty; did Byron's influence affect the course of tradition in English literature when he was, according to Pound, safely stowed away in Europe? We have seen that several of Pound's contemporaries mused upon the decline of Byron's reputation, and so it is tempting to conclude that the English Channel was not such a barrier as Pound would have us believe, and that there was, in fact, still an interchange of ideas, if not (as he states) of litteratii. Furthermore, if Byron, Keats and the others were able to benefit from the living tradition of European literature - as they ought to have - then why did they fail to ascend to the highest ranks of poetry, as others in a living tradition had done, (notably the troubadours)?

While it is not necessary to answer these and similar questions, it does show rather glaring shortcomings in Pound's account of literature.

When we look again at the Romantics, it would be easy to be convinced that the only good Romantic is an expatriate Romantic. Shelley, who spent much of his adult life abroad, is exalted as we have seen, to the realms of Dantescan clarity when at his best. But he still fails to appear on the 'lists' despite all his nutrifying European experience. On the other hand, Keats sailed to Italy on Shelley's invitation, only to die shortly after arrival; hardly the picture of a poet searching for, and discovering, new fields of poetic inspiration. Pound indulges in a wilful misreading of his life to consign him permanently overseas. And whether or not, as Pound informs us, Burns ever thought of emigrating, the fact is that he stayed at home, tied to a much-needed exciseman's income. His only venture to the Continent was to fight against the French, and he was subsequently buried by the Dumfriesshire Volunteers with military honours.

Yet another major difficulty remains. If, as Pound says, the best poets departed for a living tradition, why does its influence not appear in their work? Regardless of whether they wrote in England or Europe, they still wrote English, and because they were in touch with a healthy tradition and vital ideas, these ought to revive their own 'ailing' output and, indirectly, the flagging English

tradition. But this is not the case. On the contrary, Wordsworth is praised as a kind of unintentional proto-imagist, and Coleridge (the other great stay-at-home) is warmly cited and re-echoed by Pound; their contributions at this period (and really, as we have seen, we ought to include Keats as well) are equally as great as the emigres. Similarly with the minor authors whom Pound praises, we find that while Beddoes and Landor spend most of their life on the Continent (although Landor returned to Bath for twenty years), Crabbe never journeyed further than Scotland.

Pound, of course, sought from these poets materials, techniques and attitudes which would be useful to his own situation. His absorption with the Romantics' manner of writing is clearly evident up to about 1920; their usefulness as models to others, and their place in history is definitely decided by the mid-1930's. We have noted Wordsworth's imagism, Shelley's clarity of expression, and his likeness to Pound's great master, Dante; Byron's satirical sharpness and Keats' lyricism; all concerns voiced before 1920,when Pound was involved with the Imagist and Vortex movements, and with combatting what he saw as the late-Victorian and Georgian sludge. Secondly, when the Modernist movement is firmly established he can turn to examine the reasons for the original state of decay and depict the swelling tide of rhetoric and verbosity as it moves towards his own era. Naturally, the first and the second areas overlap, for instance when Pound writes of Crabbe in 1917:

"If the nineteenth century had built itself on Crabbe? Ah, if!" (41)

An interesting side-light arises from a comparison of the attitudes of Hulme, Eliot and Pound towards the Romantics. Not surprisingly they all concur on the need for hard, classical verse, but Hulme points out that his dislike of the Romantics takes account of two aspects: "the part of them in which they resemble all great poets, and the part in which they differ and which gives them their character as romantics" (42). Fogle observes that Eliot makes the same distinction "between the Romanticism of the Romantics and their greatness", from which he concludes that it "was in part a strategic point to clear the way for the modern poetry that was to come". (43) We have seen Pound carefully separating the wheat from the chaff in much the same way; picking out qualities which reflect Modernist and Poundian preferences, and dismissing the remainder as evidence of the decay which was to necessitate the resurrection of these qualities. The implication is that Romanticism is the dying tradition, but it is not a strong implication. Rather, the rise of Romanticism coincides with the decline of tradition; there are few technical innovations, old styles are worked to death, and "we have 'isms' and 'eses' "(44). In Guide to Kulchur he specifically contradicts that Romanticism, per se, is a bad thing; the

(41) Literary Essays p.277 (1917)
(42) TE Hulme Speculations p.124
(43) Contemporary Literary Scholarship ed L.Leary (Appleton-Century Crofts 1955) p.110
(44) Literary Essays p.287 (1918)

rot starts elsewhere:

> "Against this Miltonism, only the Romantic rebellion strove. That rebellion was itself finally degraded to luxury-trade advertisements ..." (45)

Pound's interest, then, is with the process of atrophy, not with attacking a whole movement. This orientation will become clearer as we turn to the Victorians, especially Tennyson and Browning. Tennyson represents the worst features of poetry, as we shall discover, but Browning occupies a much higher place in Pound's affections, and the contrasts that Pound finds between them should further enlighten us as to his concept of healthy and decrepit traditions.

(45) Guide to Kulchur (1938) p.181

CHAPTER III

THE VICTORIANS: TENNYSON AND BROWNING

(i) REPUTATION

While attitudes towards the Victorians are not so easy to distinguish as they are towards the Romantics, they still suffered a marked decline in reputation before the Second World War. Rather, they were not used as cannon-fodder by opposing critical factions in the same way that Shelley and Wordsworth were. Prior to the First World War, there was considerable adulation of the Victorians and their disciples, and most of the criticism of them was a post-war phenomenon. It largely arose in literary periodicals such as The Criterion and The London Mercury in the 1920's and 1930's, and, as Fricker relates, it was considerable, for "critics ... were almost unanimous in complaining of what is now called 'wordiness' ... (or) 'labyrinthine' ... 'superfluous embroidery' or meandering" (1). Fundamental essays appeared by Sturge Moore and Eliot, who, without a comprehensive condemnation, opposed "'the bright hard precision' of the metaphysical poets of

(1) R.Fricker 'Victorian Poetry in Modern English Criticism' English Studies xxiv (1942) p.129

the seventeenth century" to the "'weakening and demoralising' poetry" (2) of the Victorians. Both these critics and their followers reflected the neo-humanist attitudes in applying to Victorian poetry "laws which demand concentrated expression, a clear outline and a mainly rational subject".(3) To the twentieth-century mind the Victorians "showed themselves as vague, preoccupied, concerned too much with sound and too little with sense, overfond of decoration, and incompetent in the organisation of their materials". (4)

Much of the criticism of Tennyson is representative of the criticism of his age, and much of the criticism of 'Locksley Hall Sixty Years After', ably charted by W.D. Templemann, is representative of a substantial quantity of the criticism of Tennyson. For instance, favourable estimates of the poem abound before the First World War, with praise emanating from critics such as Giulianio (1907), Hugh Walker (1910) and Grierson (1916). In 1920, however, Thorndike and Oliver Elton expressed dissatisfaction, although Bury (1920) and Pyre(1921) were steadfast in their admiration. Nicolson (1923) stoutly praises it, while adding some astute minor criticisms, but Fausset in the same year thought the passion forceful and metallic despite ranking it highly among Tennyson's works. MacKail in 1926 was sceptical of its early admiration yet Collier, Stevenson, Richardson, Eliot, Elton and Ifor Evans all praised the poem

(2) ibid p.131
(3) ibid p.132
(4) J. Killham, Critical Essays on the Poetry of Tennyson (Routledge 1960) p.10

in varying degrees in the 1930's, largely reinstating its reputation.

In more general terms, post-war attitudes towards Tennyson have largely coalesced around two influential studios. In Tennyson: A Modern Portrait (1923), Hugh I'A Fausset was "avowedly iconoclastic" (5), looking upon Tennyson as a representative of his day and "a convenient symbol of a creed outworn".(6) Nicolson, on the other hand, in Tennyson: Aspects of his Life, Character and Poetry also published in 1923, formulated the theory of the two Tennysons: the prosperous Victorian and the unhappy soul, in order to make him amenable to a modern outlook, which, unlike the pre-war attitude saw his moralizing not as excessive, but false. While the book was something of an attempt to salvage Tennyson's sinking reputation, it spawned a host of studies on the divided sensibility question by critics such as Johnson, Buckley, E.E. Smith, Carr and others.

Eliot, in 1936, emphasised Tennyson's technical virtuosity and pronounced his ear the finest since Milton, while Auden described it as the finest ear of all, despite calling him "undoubtedly the stupidest English poet".(7) So, by the late 1930's, opinion on Tennyson was returning to a state of equilibrium, which was not, however, the case with Browning.

(5) J. Kissane Alfred Tennyson (Twayne 1970) p.26
(6) J. Killham Critical Essays p.5
(7) J. Kissane Alfred Tennyson p.27

Although there was a sharp split in Browning criticism at the turn of the century, the decline in reputation came at a later date and was less marked than that of Tennyson. The Modernist poets, in particular Eliot and Pound, used his poetry as models for their own work, and praise was forthcoming from Chesterton, and the Browning Society, of course, was active in publicising and often propagandizing his work. The most damaging criticism came from Santayana, who, in his essay 'The Poetry of Barbarism' (1908), saw him floundering in a mass of ideas and values. The major change of attitude, though, came after the First World War, and where "he was read and praised too much by the late Victorians and Edwardians", his optimism seemed very false "to generations harried by wars and a vast social unrest".(8) The result was not criticism but, rather, neglect. As J.R. Watson remarks, "between the two world wars there was little significant Browning criticism". Shanks, a diciple of the psycho-analytical school of thought argued, as Fricker tells us, "that Browning was too afraid to show his mind" and as a result his poetry is "poetry in the process of being strangled". (9) F.L.Lucas (1930) was unenthusiastic, so was Herbert Read who complained that he was "just wordy". F.R. Leavis concluded in New Bearings in English Poetry that "so inferior a mind and spirit as Browning's could not provide the impulse

(8) F.E. Faverty ed. The Victorian Poets:A Guide to Research (H.U.P.1956) p.59
(9) R. Fricker 'Victorian Poetry in Modern Criticism' p.134

needed to bring into poetry the adult intelligence".(10) Even Browning's reputation as a thinker declined from a peak in 1912 to reach a low point in the 1950's, this despite Eliot's placement of Browning as a poet with Donne, Laforgue and Corbière, and despite Abercrombie's admiration (1932). When De Vane lists the objections to Browning's poetry expressed by critics in 1955, it becomes clear that his general reputation still showed no signs of recovery by the Second World War.

(ii) POUND'S VIEWS

Virtually all Pound's views on Tennyson are uncomplimentary. Tennyson is closely linked to Pound's general attitude towards the Victorians, so that utterances on one apply almost as well to the other. Tennyson stands as the principal example of a decayed tradition which is imprecise, unenlightening and stagnant. Technique no longer advances, and so neither does knowledge. In fact, "general knowledge appears to have diminished to zero", Pound writes when an editor "rebuked some alliterative verse on the grounds that a consonant had been repeated despite Tennyson's warning".(11) Pound recognises Tennyson's huge and unhealthy influences when he observes "the edifying spectacle of Browning in Italy and Tennyson in Buckingham Palace".(12) The result of this influence

(10) Men and Women and other poems ed. J.R.Watson (MacMillan 1974) p.10
(11) ABC of Reading p.193
(12) Literary Essays p.32 (1929)

was that the "sense of life" remained abundant in literature "until the stultifying period in Wordsworth and Tennyson".(13)

Tennyson's shortcomings, although they are legion, are seen as stemming from an inability "to blurt out the facts of life", for "this urge, this impulse ... leads Tennyson into pretty embroideries".(14) He had a lady-like attitude toward the printed page and an "ineffable 'something' which kept Tennyson out of his works".(15) He is also, before he becomes Poet Laureate "Tennyson 'so muzzy that he tried to get out through the fireplace'".(16)

Such grave faults lead inexorably to dullness, and Tennyson writing for "Viccy's ignorant ear" became "the Tate Gallery among poets"(17) Dullness, as we know, is proof of a decrepit tradition, but this, apparently, is quite satisfactory to the British public who "always will like all art, poetry ... in just such measure as it approaches the Tennysonian tone" (18) much to their eternal damnation.

Pound finds an interesting ally in Henry James, whose remarks he quotes on several occasions with regard to Tennyson, for "it did not require much divination by

(13) Selected Letters p.205 (1916)
(14) Literary Essays p.277 (1917)
(15) ibid p.276
(16) ibid p.290 (1918)
(17) ibid p.276 (1917)
(18) loc.cit.

1914 ... to note that he found Tennyson rather vacuous". (19) James, of course, falls squarely into the class of the master craftsman, and consequently any comments he has to make "are of infinitely more value than any anecdotes of the Laureate".(20)

Perhaps the heart of the matter, though, of Pound's attitude towards Tennyson, is contained in a distinction he makes in the Active Anthology (1933):

> 'It is much easier to think the Odyssey or le Testament or Catullus' Epithalamium as something living than as a series of cenotaphs. After all, Homer, Villon, Propertius speak of the world as I know it, whereas Mr Tennyson and Dr. Bridges did not.'(21)

Because Browning is favoured by Pound, he has much more to say about him than about Tennyson; but it is not entirely praise, nor is it contained just in the prose writings. However, Pound's attitude towards Browning is so clearly defined in the prose, that it is necessary only to touch upon the poetry.

Browning, according to Pound, is a craftsman who attempts to keep tradition alive, and while neither he nor Swinburne is a "whole or perfect poet", they are "the best of the Victorian era".(22) Browning's struggle, along with Crabbe, Stendhal and Flaubert was against "the almost

(19) Make it New p.267
(20) Literary Essays p.332 (1918)
(21) Selected Prose p.360 (1933)
(22) Literary Essays p.293 (1918)

uninterrupted decadence of writers' attention for centuries after Dante"(23). Consequently, "Browning at his best went on with Crabbe's method" (24) because he was endowed with a "prying inquisitiveness " (25) recognised by Landor, and "a revivalist spirit", whereas the majority of Victorians "wrote as non-interveners".(26) Browning's ability is similar to Ovid's in that he "raises the dead and dissects their mental processes; he works with the people of myth".(27) Moreover, in England he "refreshed the form of monologue or dramatic monologue or 'persona'" (28) which was of keen interest to Pound. Indeed, he revised the form so well that Sordello "is one of the finest masks ever presented" (29), even if it does defy comprehension. Similarly, the form of Men and Women "is the most vital form of that period in English".(30)

Browning's faults, on the other hand, are quite pronounced, since he wrote "to a theory of the Universe, thereby cutting off a fair half of the moods for expression".(31) In the same way Men and Women loses intensity in the proportion that it includes "a certain amount of ratiocination and of purely intellectual content".(32) The most penetrating

(23) Literary Essays p.210 (1934)
(24) ibid p.278 (1917)
(25) Guide to Kulchur p.287
(26) ibid p.290
(27) Spirit of Romance p.16
(28) ABC of Reading p.62
(29) Ezra Pound ed. J.P. Sullivan p.51
(30) Literary Essays p.419 (1917)
(31) ibid p.293 (1918)
(32) ibid p.419 (1917)

criticism, though, is focussed on Browning's translation of the Agamemnon of Aeschylus. His weakness, Pound tells us, lies in his understanding of the term 'ideas'. To him an idea "is only an imperfect induction of fact".(33) Browning is also guilty of an unreadable condensation and convolution of the word-order, since he was unaware that the uninflected English language will not behave like the perturbations of order in a "language inflected as Greek and Latin are inflected".(34) Milton, too, committed the same error of attempting to write English as if it was Latin. The same fault is satirised in Mesmerism:

> "You wheeze as a head-cold long-tonsilled Calliope" (35)

a poem which also exposes Pound's admiration for his abilities:

> "But God! What a sight you ha' got o' our in'ards" (36)

and the fact that he is a "crafty dissector". Pound also speaks warmly of his optimism, the "Heart that was big as the bowels of Vesuvius".(37)

Finally, when Pound speaks feelingly that "the hell is that one catches Browning's manner and mannerisms", he is not only outlining his own debt to Browning, but also defining Browning's importance to the Modernist movement

(33) Literary Essays p.267 (1919)
(34) ibid p.268
(35) Selected Poems p.41
(36) loc.cit.
(37) loc.cit.

for he can "get at life almost as 'simply' as did Ovid or Catullus: but then he was one 'classicist' mid a host of Victorians". (38) In this statement he places Browning at the opposite pole to Tennyson, one as an example of the living tradition, and the other as the representative of a decrepit tradition.

(iii) COMPARISONS AND COMMENTARY

Pound's views on Tennyson not only correlate quite closely to those of his contemporaries, but also seem to pre-date them to some extent. His criticism of Tennyson's sterility and 'safeness' are echoed by late commentators but in an expended form. Similarly, Tennyson's 'embroideries' are also enlarged upon by other critics into criticism of his verboseness and prolixity. Yet in Pound's later writings we can sense the same element of detachment that appeared in his attitudes towards the Romantics. Tennyson forms the butt of uncomplimentary comparisons, and in the early work he is connected with a sense of the oppressiveness of the period's verse which seems to dog Pound, who complains that the "British public liked, has liked, likes and always will like all art, music, poetry ... in just such measure as it approaches the Tennysonian tone".(39)

(38) Selected Prose p.32 (1911-1912)
(39) Literary Essays p.276 (1917)

Tennyson, as a representative of a decrepit tradition is the object of even less admiration than Wordsworth. Whereas Wordsworth is depicted as a sheep with an "unquestionable" genius, Tennyson is described as an "ox". Moreover, as a "'North-country' ox with deplorable manners". (40) The saving grace in Wordsworth is his imagistic ability which still managed to survive in fleeting instances amidst the ravages of verbosity; Tennyson, however, has nothing to recommend him. He begins his career as a "muzzy", imprecise writer, and ends it as a symbol of degeneration by accepting the post of Poet Laureate. In accepting such an influential position he lends his ear to the ignorant British public, whom Pound abhors so much, and presumably echoes their inanities in verse. The implication, of course, is that literary successors of Tennyson will not only inherit his shortcomings, but multiply them in Pound's own time. Tennyson, then, is the immediate root of the disease which it is up to Pound to cure. Even the pre-Raphaelites, with all their failings, are more to be admired; for instance, Christina Rossetti "had these qualities (of a certain limpidity and precision) it is true - in places" (41) whereas Tennyson, according to Pound, never had them. Herein lies the crux of the problem, for Tennyson is attacked because he fulfils none of the criteria for <u>imagist</u> poetry. The further a writer stands from these criteria, the more vehement are Pound's objections. In fact, a writer is <u>only</u> praised if some facet of his work

(40) ibid p.290 (1918)
(41) <u>Literary Essays</u> p.373 (1914)

conforms to Pound's own concerns and designs. While Pound undoubtedly adopts this attitude partly to ensure the erection of Modernist standards, it also reflects Pound's more personal inclinations, for Pound's views remain virtually unaltered from the time he leaves England, when the Modernist position is firmly established in its own right.

Pound's view of Browning relates closely to the early critical opinion of this century because his view formed a part of the critical spectrum. However, while later Browning criticism deplores the optimism and the amateur psychology, to Pound the optimism is "something one would always like to keep by one".(42) Unlike his later contemporaries, Pound never found Browning wordy; if anything, rather the opposite, as he remarks of Sordello in the ABC of Reading that "there is here a lucidity of sound that I think you will find with difficulty elsewhere in English". (43) However, the relationship of Pound to Browning marks another subtle change of attitude. If we compare one of Pound's earliest lists, written as a recommendation to William Carlos Williams as to who has been who in literary affairs over the last century, we can see not only the changes of influence, but also the altering degrees of importance that certain figures have to Pound. In the letter in question he writes:

(42) N.Christoph de Nagy The Poetry of Ezra Pound:The Pre-Imagist Stage (Francke Verlag Bern 1960) p.106
(43) ABC of Reading p.180

> "If you'll read Yeats and Browning and Francis Thompson and Swinburne and Rossetti you'll learn something about the progress of English poetry in the last century. And if you'll read Margaret Sackville, Rosamund Watson, Ernest Rhys, Jim G. Fairfax, you'll learn what the people of second-rank can do, and what darn good work it is!" (44)

When we compare this to the last part of the 'metamorphosis' of English poetry as presented in the ABC of Reading we find:

"Crabbe"	1754/1832
Landor	1775/1864
Browning	1812/1889
Fitzgerald	1809/1883
Walt Whitman	1819/1892" (45)

Undoubtedly Pound's vastly enlarged knowledge of literature removes some of the secondary authors he mentions, but more importantly, the lists mark a change in the kinds of influences that affected Pound. The later list includes only writers who insisted on, or practised, the technique of verse; we know this to be true because Pound has endlessly pointed out this merit of theirs, (e.g. Crabbe who "has no variety of metric" but who "shows no inconsiderable skill in the use of his one habitual metre".(46)) Writers with a vague or mystical element to their verse have entirely disappeared. Pound himself had risen to the front rank of poets in the interim, and while he may have thought Sackville, Watson, Rhys and Fairfax good in 1919, there is little doubt he would have condemned them in 1934. The only constants are Browning and Yeats. His standpoint, in other words, had changed, and the early influences -

(44) Selected Letters p.8
(45) ABC of Reading (1934) p.160
(46) Literary Essays p.277 (1917)

even early attitudes - have almost entirely evaporated in 1934. Thus, while he might have asked "What is Beauty" in an article (47) published in 1908, the very question stems from a pre-Raphaelite outlook. By the 1930's not only the question but the possibility of asking the question seriously had vanished, to be replaced by enquiries into the methods of discovering or creating Beauty. Matters such as 'emotional intensity', 'living knowledge' and 'the art of the lyric' exchange places with Truth or Beauty, and so the re-definition of the questions imposes new conceptual limitations.

As Pound ages, his attitude towards Browning alters slightly, as we have seen it do with other writers. N. Christoph de Nagy notes that the Pound of the Personae mainly praises the epic quality of Sordello. But the Pound of the Cantos is a fully-fledged craftsman with a firm command of his technique, and Browning tends to be recommended as a standard for other writers to reach. Pound advised Sarah Cope in 1934 to "try Browning's Sordello"(47) as a solution to her difficulties, and he observes of one page of Binyon's Cantos that "Browning would have liked it".(48)

One of Pound's major debts to Browning is for the technique of the masks. N. Christoph de Nagy, among others, sets out the nature of this debt (49), but it is enough for

(47) Selected Letters p.257
(48) ibid p.313 (1938)
(49) op.cit pp.110-117

us to acknowledge Pound's experiments with the form in a large number of poems, often in ways that only partially related to Browning's handling of the form. In Personae they are largely experimentation as Pound prepares to take up the role of Polumetis in his later work. The results of the preparation are evident in The Cantos, where the adoption of different voices and modes of personality allows Pound a considerable flexibility in the presentation of his subject matter.

We can briefly dispose of Swinburne and the pre-Raphaelites, neither of whom features very greatly in Pound's polemics. Both were an early influence in Pound, as many of the poems in his first publications bear witness. While the early influence may have disappeared, Pound still eulogises Swinburne in 1918, in 'Swinburne versus his Biographies'. He warmly praises him for recognizing "poetry as an art, and as an art of verbal music" (50) but makes it clear that Swinburne fails to make the front rank because in him "the word-selecting, word-castigating faculty was nearly absent".(51) A predeliction for "unusual and gorgeous words" which give rise to "an emotional fusion of the perceptions" leads only to "a certain kind of verbal confusion" (52) and it is this aspect which finally debars him from the higher slopes of Pound's private Parnassus. The intense admiration he inspired in the young pre-Imagist Pound is summed up in Salve O Pontifex, but with the maturing

(50) Literary Essays p.292 (1918)
(51) ibid p.293
(52) ibid pp.293-294

of Pound's literary discrimination we find that "the whole of his defects can be summed up into one - that is, inaccurate writing"(53), and for the inability to produce precise literature, Swinburne is eventually condemned never to appear in the later lists.

Of the pre-Raphaelites, K. Ruthven tells us that "the bugbear in Pound's case was Rossetti".(54) And as Pound put it, "Rossetti made his own language: I hadn't in 1910 made a language, I don't mean a language to use, but even a language to think in".(55) When he had manufactured a language to think in he was able to look back and see in Rossetti's translations that despite the "purple plush and molasses trimmings he meant by 'beauty' something fairly near what we mean by the 'emotional intensity' of his original".(56) Thus, the glimmer of 'real' poetry remains for Rossetti just a glimmer; it is left to Pound to go further and discover the true sources of poetic verity.

It must be clear by now that Romanticism is seen by Pound as neither a particularly healthy or unhealthy tradition in itself. The good Victorian, Browning, when compared to the bad Victorian, Tennyson, is judged more favourably because of the ways he conforms to Imagist, or even Poundian tenets of good writing which, of course, are classically oriented. Romanticism, so far, has barely

(53) ibid p.293
(54) K.K.Ruthven A Guide to Ezra Pound's Personae (1926) (Univ.of California, 1969) p.13
(55) Literary Essays p.194 (1917)
(56) ibid p.268 (1918)

entered as an element of contention, and as we have seen, Pound fails to see either Browning or Tennyson as part of a possible Romantic tradition. Rather, he looks for examples of good or bad writing in a poet rather as a teacher marking exercises looks for rules obeyed or broken. Of course, his concerns are wider than those of any teacher, but it does illustrate that his search for impeccable standards of writing is almost irrespective of the poetic or literary tradition in which they are found — in this case the Romantic tradition. It only remains for us to examine his attitude towards his own time and discover how he looks upon the highly Romantic Lawrence and the more austere Eliot.

CHAPTER IV

THE CONTEMPORARIES: ELIOT AND LAWRENCE

(i) REPUTATION

The reputations of T.S. Eliot and D.H. Lawrence may be considered relatively briefly because neither writer attracted any public attention before 1910. Eliot had not yet started to publish, and Lawrence had only recently come to the notice of Hueffer. Therefore it is true to say that much of the course of their reputation was established during and after the 1930's, which can only be of very minor concern to us.

Eliot's initial appearances in print were accorded a very neutral response, typi fied by The Athanaeum, which classified his verse in 1917 as 'Beardsleyesque', and the Times Literary Supplement which found Prufrock to be "untouched by any genuine rush of feeling"(1) Before the publication of The Waste Land, then, Eliot's verse, championed by Pound, was really only admired among literary circles. But even The Waste Land was subjected to a fairly

(1) George Watson 'The Triumph of T.S.Eliot' The Critical Quarterly VII, 4, 1965 p.330

hostile reception. The London Mercury was "unable to make head or tail of it" (2) in 1923, and the Times Literary Supplement complained that 'here is a poet capable of a style more refined than that of any of his generation, parodying without taste or skill".(3) Middleton Murry thought that no-one would read it in fifty years' time. However, by 1926 the tide was definitely turning. I.A. Richards praised Eliot highly in Principles of Literary Criticism and Laura Riding and Robert Graves favourably compared The Waste Land with In Memoriam and even the Aeneid in 1927. Dobrée called Eliot's criticism "'the most important in English since Coleridge wrote his Biographia Literaria'"(4), with which Williamson concurred in 1932. Of course, not everyone was enthusiastic, and Ivor Brown could still call The Waste Land "balderdash" and "pretentious bungling with the English language"(5) in 1934, to be echoed by J.B. Priestley, who thought Eliot 'donnish, pedantic, cold".(6) However, Empson used part of The Waste Land in Seven Types of Ambiguity (1930) and E.M. Forster, in 1928, called Eliot the poet of a whole generation. So complete was the revolution of opinion by 1930 that, as George Watson points out, "from then on the evidence is almost tediously one-sided"(7) - and increasingly voluminous as Martha Mitchell demonstrates in

(2) C.K.Stead The New Poetic (Hutchinson 1964) p.116
(3) loc.cit.
(4) George Watson 'The Triumph of T.S.Eliot 'Critical Quarterly p.330
(5) Ivor Brown I Commit to the Flames (Cape 1934) p.10
(6) I. Donnelly The Joyous Pilgrimage (Dent 1935) p.133
(7) George Watson 'The Triumph of T.S.Eliot 'Critical Quarterly p.331

A Half-Century of Eliot Criticism (1972). From 1930 onwards, Eliot's influence, both academic and poetic, continued unabated. F.R. Leavis reviewing Cambridge Poetry 1929 took Eliot's place for granted, along with many others, when he remarked that "Mr Eliot's influence ... of course, predominates "(8).

Lawrence's reputation, unfortunately, has been neither so secure nor so dazzling. His name only too readily brings back memories of the furore concerning Lady Chatterley's Lover. While it is true that much of the criticism of Lawrence centred upon his treatment of sexual themes, there was a more complex response than this to his work.

Reaction to Lawrence's early works was increasingly, if only gradually, favourable. For instance, The Saturday Review in 1911, thought that Lawrence, in the bucolic passages of The White Peacock seemed "almost to rival the skill of Mr. Thomas Hardy" (9),while The Bookman called Sons and Lovers "a novel of outstanding quality"(10), in 1913. But in 1915, with the suppression of The Rainbow six weeks after publication, we can see a clear change of attitude, which Douglas Goldring accurately summed up:

> "The deafening silence, broken only by the sound of the white rabbits of criticism scuttling for cover will not soon be forgotten by those who were in London at the time" (11)

(8) loc.cit.
(9) Critics of D.H.Lawrence ed.W.T.Anderson (Allen and Unwin 1971)p.14
(10) ibid p.16
(11) D.H.Lawrence ed. H.Coombes (Penguin 1973) p.133

From hereon there was an obvious polarity of opinion about Lawrence, which was often fused into the same article. Typical of this ambivalence is the Star review of The Rainbow which suggested that "if Mr. Lawrence desires to save his genius from destruction he must discover or rediscover ... that man is a moral being with a conscience and an aim." (12)

By the 1920's Lawrence was considered increasingly as a rough, untutored genius, and one who often employed his talents poorly. E.B.C. Jones asserted in 1924, in The Athenaeum, for example, that his laziness and imprecision were "the faults of a giant"(13). Yet the opposition was also gathering strength as a headline for Women in Love in John Bull attests in 1921:

"LOATHSOME STUDY OF SEX DEPRAVITY -
MISLEADING YOUTH TO UNSPEAKABLE DISASTER"
(14)

The antagonism was fuelled further with the appearance of Lady Chatterly's Lover in 1928 and the Warren Gallery exhibition in 1929. In fact, as H. Coombes relates, in the 1920's "a consensus had established itself ... of which the key-notes were 'dissipated' and 'corrupt', with the emphasis increasingly on the latter".(15) But the lowest point of Lawrence's reputation was not reached until the 1930's, after his death, and despite the efforts of

(12) ibid p.101
(13) Critics on D.H. Lawrence p.28
(14) D.H. Lawrence p.41
(15) ibid p.42

F.R. Leavis, his most outspoken ally. As E.M. Forster realised, "no-one who alienates both Mrs. Grundy and Aspasia can hope for a good obituary Press" (16), and although there were other voices of dissention, the majority of opinion supported Middleton Murry's judgement that "we can only pronounce it (Women in Love) as sub-human and bestial".(17) From 1930 until the Second World War, the continuing decline of his reputation has gone almost entirely unchecked, even to the point of comparison with Hitler and Nazism; a sad comment on a writer who was hailed as a genius, albeit an erratic one, in the early 1920's.

(ii) POUND'S VIEWS

Pound's comments on Eliot are far too extensive to allow the inclusion here of anything more than a representative sampling, because Eliot's impact on Pound was very considerable from the outset. After their second meeting, Pound remarked in a letter to Harriet Monroe that he was "jolly well right about Eliot", and that Eliot had sent him "the best poem I have yet had or seen from an American".(18) What particularly delighted Pound was that Eliot had "actually trained himself and modernised himself on his own". (19) As he was well aware, "the rest of the promising young have done one or other but never both", and "most of the swine havedone neither".(20) His high opinion

(16) ibid p.219
(17) ibid p.42
(18) Selected Letters p.40 (1914)
(19) loc.cit
(20) loc.cit.

of Eliot's abilities never altered; as he wrote, again to Harriet Monroe, in 1915, "Eliot is intelligent, very" (21) - and 'intelligent', he pointed out, was an adjective that was seldom in his mouth. Indeed, Eliot turned out to be so bright that Pound was forced to remark that "Eliot has thought of things I had not thought of, and I'm damned if many of the others have done so".(22) He also insisted on Eliot's essential American traits, such that "no-one but an American can ever know, really know how good he is at the bottom".(23)

Pound's excitement at the discovery of Eliot was principally because of his poetic potential. His praise of Prufrock was high; it was "more individual and unusual than Portrait of a Lady" (24) - a most unlikely comparison with one of Pound's heroes, to Eliot's advantage. He also lauded the poem for "its fine tone, its humanity, and its realism" (25), and in his review for The Egoist implied that its success was due in part to its conformity to Vorticist, and even Poundian principles ("above all, there is no rhetoric" (26)).

Of The Waste Land he wrote to Eliot, "Compliments, you bitch, I am wracked by the seven jealousies" (27).

(21) ibid p.49 (1915)
(22) ibid p.114 (1916)
(23) Literary Essays p.302 (1918)
(24) Selected Letters p.66 (1916)
(25) Literary Essays p.420 (1917)
(26) ibid p.419
(27) Selected Letters p.169 (1921)

To Felix Schelling he wrote that "Eliot's Waste Land is, I think, the justification of the 'movement' of our own modern experiment since 1900".(28) He is, though, surprisingly vague about the rest of Eliot's creative output, apart from mentioning that he heard Murder in the Cathedral on the radio in 1936 and remarking "My Krissz them cawkney voices. Mzzr Shakzpeer still retains his posishun".(29) Yet he does, in 1942, acknowledge that Eliot surpasses him in the matter of logopoeia, but maintains that he is superior in the use of melopoeia, adding that part of Eliot's logopoeia "is incompatible to my main purpose".(30)

While Pound might wax lyrical about the poetry, he assumes a more sceptical attitude towards the prose, remarking, for instance, that Eliot attained his "supreme Eminence" among critics "largely through disguising himself as a corpse".(31) His main objection voiced to John Quinn in 1919, is that Eliot adopts "the 'English Department' universitaire attitude" that literature is something "which your blasted New England conscience makes you feel you ought to enjoy". (32) Obviously there was no reconciliation of viewpoints although he considers that they both "'belong to the same school of critics' in so far as we both believe that existing works form a complete order which is changed by the introduction of the 'really new' work". (33) His

(28) ibid p.180 (1922)
(29) ibid p.277 (1935)
(30) Selected Prose p.291 (1942)
(31) ibid p.53 (1930)
(32) Selected Letters p.151 (1919)
(33) Polite Essays p.135 (1933)

objection is to the "Keerful Criterese", which he thought was to protect Eliot "agin the bareboreians".(34) He considered his "flattering obeisance to 'exponents of criticism'" who had not accepted the concept of autotelic activity , to be "so much apple-sauce".(35) His attitude is clear: "Damn your taste, I would like if possible to sharpen your perceptions, after which your taste can take care of itself".(36) He also parodies what he feels to be the faults in Eliot's approach as 'lanwidg of Agon sustained thru a lively and brefftakink axshun to a Tomthunderink KlimuXX'.(37) He is equally unable to share Eliot's religious enthusiasm, referring to "J.H.'s criticism 'a lot of dead cod about a dead god'"as an apt description of "a good deal of T.S.E.'s activity".(38) Perhaps it is partly for this reason that he omitted to comment on much of Eliot's later poetry.

Pound's attitude towards Lawrence is a great deal simpler mainly because there is a great deal less of it. There seems to be only one reference to Lawrence- and a passing one at that - after 1930, and the vast majority of his comments appear before 1920. His initial reaction to Lawrence was one of strong interest, although he condemned the "middling-sensual erotic verses" in a review of Love Poems (Poetry, 1913) as "a sort of pre-Raphaelite slush". (39) But when "Mr Lawrence ceases to discuss his own

(34) Selected Letters p.302 (1937)
(35) Polite Essays p.136 (1933)
(36) loc.cit.
(37) Selected Letters p.303 (1938)
(38) Guide to Kulchur (1938) p.301
(39) Literary Essays p.387 (1913)

disagreeable sensations" and "writes low-life narrative", then "there is no English poet under forty who can get within a shot of him".(40) Whether Pound, who was twenty-eight at the time included himself in this proclamation is not recorded. The difference between Lawrence and other writers is that he, "almost alone among the younger poets, has realised that contemporary poetry must be as good as contemporary prose".(41) In this respect, it is "for the narrative verse that Mr Lawrence is to be esteemed" (42), almost as much as for his prose. While he considers Violets and Whether or Not to be "great art", the same article in New Freewoman also makes it clear that Lawrence is "less happy in impressions" (43) than he is in narrative and low-life verse.

Pound disliked Lawrence personally, finding him to be a"detestable person, but needs watching". (44) He tried, however, to be never less than fair towards him, and told Harriet Monroe that he recognised "certain qualities of his work". (45) Indeed, he went so far as to admit that Lawrence probably "learned the proper treatment of modern subjects before I did". (46)

Lawrence's star began to wane in Pound's eyes when he was seized by Amy Lowell as a contributor for Some

(40) Loc.cit.
(41) 'In Metre'New Freewoman London 1,6 (Sept.1913) p.113
(42) loc.cit
(43) loc.cit
(44) Selected Letters p.17 (1913)
(45) ibid p.22 (1913)
(46) ibid p.17

Imagist Poets (which first appeared in 1915) along with other colleagues of Pound, allowing him to assert righteously, in 1927, that "Lawrence was never an Imagist, he was an Amygiste".(47) Lawrence's prose was not exempted from criticism, either, when Pound stated that he did want to write "even good stories, in a loaded, ornate style, heavy with sex, fruity, with a certain sort of emotion".(48) Lawrence, too, suffered in comparison with Joyce, whose style was much more to Pound's liking, and while Pound, in 1914, felt them to be "the two strongest prose writers among les jeunes"(49) it was only Joyce who continued to win almost unmitigated praise. As Forrest Read puts it, Lawrence was "an early admiration whom Joyce supplanted as the best of his generation".(50) In short, Lawrence fell from grace, damned by many of the worst faults of his Victorian forebears. Even The Rainbow was described as "a novel sexually overloaded, a sort of post-Wellsian barrocco" which depended for its sale "precisely on its overloading".(51) In his place, of course, stood Joyce, who wrote "with a clear hardness, accepting all things, defining all things in clean outline".(52)

(47) ibid p.212 (1927)
(48) Pound/Joyce p.32 (1915)
(49) Selected Letters p.34 (1914)
(50) Pound/Joyce p.32
(51) ibid p.282 (1916)
(52) ibid p.32

(iii) COMPARISONS AND COMMENTARY

The fact that Pound and Eliot were not only close friends but also close literary allies is undoubtedly responsible for the considerable similarity of their views on poetics.

Because of this like-mindedness they agreed upon the necessity for a classical stance in modern poetry, which possessed hard, clear, concise and Imagistic qualities, and on a similar concept of tradition, leading to Eliot's formulation of the concept of the dissociation of sensibility, and also to his observation that the Romantics "punish us from their graves with the annual scourge of the Georgian Anthology".(53) It is in their ideas on the function of literature that they differed. However, it is quite probable that Pound's scepticism of Eliot's attitude was based on more than a theoretical basis. Pound, by rejecting the English literary and critical tradition as it stood, and choosing to live in isolation at Rapallo , could hardly look with pleasure at Eliot's ascendancy through a hierarchy he despised. Yet even the approach to criticism is different. Pound insisted that criticism should produce new perceptions, not change the present public taste in literature, which is what he saw Eliot trying to accomplish. However, in 1933, he was still prepared to

(53) quoted in John Press A Map of Modern English Verse (O.U.P. 1969) p.82

acknowledge him as "England's most accurate critic" (54) despite his "affected and artyficial language".(55) Eliot, of course, placed much more importance on the need for criticism than did Pound, who saw it serving either as a method of excernment or as a gunsight, and only being effective as the former. Indeed, it must act as the former because "you cannot get the whole cargo of a sinking paideuma onto the lifeboat".(56) Since Eliot enters into the group of critics who are "pestilential vermin" who "distract attention from the best" to inferior work, or even to their own work, he is seen as misusing his abilities. The essential point to note is that Pound only wrote on those whom, he felt, had something to add to literature or knowledge, as a good biologist does in his field. Bad writers were subject only to fleeting disparagement. In this way, Pound's intention was to assemble a new order (which had only been obscured by the old order), whereas Eliot wanted to alter the old.

Eliot, in many respects, is seen as the answer to the problem of tradition. Before he met Pound he had already 'modernised' himself, as we heard, but more importantly, it was his work which was the justification of the movement. In one way, then, there was little need for Pound to comment on his later poetry because the poetics had been vindicated in practice. Thus, after the initial championing of Eliot, and the emphasis upon a radical group

(54) Polite Essays p.144 (1933)
(55) Guide to Kulchur p.324
(56) Polite Essays p.148

of artists (Joyce, Wyndham Lewis, Eliot and Gaudier-Brzeska, for example), the new vision of tradition was to some extent triumphant. It is probable, then, that Pound had no further need to play the public figure, nor was there such an urgent need to agree publicly with Eliot on absolutely everything. He could afford to retire to Rapallo, and privacy, and continue to develop his own perceptions in The Cantos. Moreover it was easier to criticise Eliot, as we have noted, since Eliot was established in his own right. Interestingly, though, Pound appears not so much as an individualist (as he certainly was) but more as an outsider. He writes from outside the artistic milieu of London and Paris, expounds increasingly eccentric views, and seemingly receives no satisfaction from Eliot's growing reputation - a reputation born from Vorticist and Poundian principles.

When we turn to Lawrence, we are faced with explaining Pound's change of heart towards him. Fortunately, it is not quite so difficult as it might seem. Pound makes it clear from the earliest reviews that Lawrence has a tendency to revert to Victorian and pre-Raphaelite standards. When he praises him, it is for adhering to poetic principles similar to Pound's. He realised, Pound thought, that poetry must be as well written as prose - a point which Pound was anxious to emphasise as vital to the production of good verse. Therefore, upon finding a poet who practises this very virtue, it is not surprising that Pound is prepared to champion him. Moreover, Lawrence displays an

ability for realism and concreteness in his faithful reproductions of low-life narrative, qualities which Pound had also stressed. But perhaps the key point to notice is that Lawrence learned the proper treatment of modern subjects before Pound. The question we must ask is: what, to Pound, was the proper treatment? Indubitably the answer is contained in Imagist principles - how could they (to Pound) be otherwise? In this light, Lawrence could be seen as an Imagist who had arrived at his conclusions separately from Pound. His subsequent dismissal from the fold, then, was that he abandoned the 'right' principles, and Pound, to follow Amy Lowell. Since Pound had had no great affection for him anyway, it was not an irreconcileable loss, but Pound's assertion that he was only ever an Amygiste probably arises as much from a feeling of pique as from fact. Certainly Lawrence's further ventures into poetry remain unmentioned by Pound, although this could be attributed partly to Pound's absence from England.

Pound's change of opinion with regard to Lawrence's prose involves some hazier conjectures, however. Until Joyce's rapid ascendancy in Pound's eyes, Lawrence was regarded as a promising writer with a reasonable knowledge of craft. But Pound had never professed to any skill in prose, nor to any qualifications as a critic of it. Rather, he was quite content to accept the judgements of men whom he considers to be masters of their art - especially Henry James, (though how he came to look upon one novelist as more important than another is debatable - perhaps he took Hueffer's advice). Thus, it is highly likely that he was

unsure precisely what qualities he sought for in a prose writer until the arrival of James Joyce on the scene in 1913. Lawrence was always certainly a Romantic, whereas Joyce wrote with a "clear hardness"(57) as we have noted, and as Pound made it plain to him, "I'm not supposed to know much about prose but I think your novel is damned fine stuff".(58) From here it was, no doubt, relatively easy to jettison Lawrence now that clear critical standards had been erected. Lawrence's virtues, as discussed above, were overshadowed by his faults; the slush and the disagreeable sensations came to the fore, while the qualities of workmanship receded into the background. Indeed, Pound went so far as to concur with the disapproving critics of the day that there was an overemphasis on sex. This complaint, though, looks less credible when we find it, in the letter to Matthews, used as a contrast to the purity of Pound's own work, Lustra, which he was trying to persuade Matthews to publish in the "present panic among printers".(59) Yet it would be inaccurate to think that Pound had dismissed Lawrence altogether, for he did concede that Lawrence was a "writer of some power", and that, while he had never envied him, he had "often enjoyed him".(60) The implication, then, seems to be that Pound was unwilling to include Lawrence in the vanguard of Modernist writers, while allowing that he had a certain amount of talent. No doubt, this feeling was strengthened by his personal distaste for

(57) Pound/Joyce p.32 (1915)
(58) ibid p.24 (1914)
(59) ibid p.282 (1916)
(60) ibid p.32

Lawrence, while Joyce - who, like Eliot, appeared as a fully-fledged Modernist writer - and he kept up a regular correspondence well into the 1920's.

It is highly likely, therefore, that personal circumstances were responsible to a considerable degree in Pound's final rejection of Lawrence, both as a writer and a poet. Eliot and Joyce with their firmly classical outlook, could never have been in a similar position. But we do see the same pattern emerging; Pound praises a Romantic writer for his adherence to classical and Imagist principles, and ignores him when he apparently neglects them. The about-face that occurred with Lawrence does not mark any alteration of Pound's outlook, but rather, as we see when we look more closely, tends to confirm the continuity of the outlook.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS.

Pound's critical proclamations have not been the object of unmitigated praise by his contemporaries; nor, in many cases, has his poetry fared much better. The fluctuating course of his reputation has been well charted by, among others, Eric Homberger (1), who notes the increasing incomprehension that greeted both his poetry and prose over the years. While he was seen initially as an interesting and forceful personality, whose critical works often failed to live up to expectations, he was regarded in his later years with considerable scepticism, and as a writer who practised a highly eccentric and erratic form of scholasticism which ought not to be taken too seriously. Thus Philip Mairet, writing in The Criterion, could say of Guide to Kulchur that it was "unlikely that even the youngest pupil will take Mr. Pound's book for a serious anatomy of culture; even the title alone is warning".(2) Yet it was precisely these reviewers who failed to see the essential consistency and coherence of most of Pound's views,

(1) E. Homberger, Ezra Pound: The Critical Heritage (Routledge and Kegan Paul 1972)
(2) ibid. p.333.

while discovering only brilliant but scattered perceptions. Prior to the Second World War it was left virtually to Pound's colleagues to appreciate and advertise - as Eliot, for example, continued to do - the importance of his observations.

As we have seen with Pound's treatment of the Romantics and their successors, we are not dealing with a confused or erratic mind, but rather, with a powerful and tightly-focussed point of view: so much is obvious. Of course, the way in which the focus is brought to bear is a different matter. In every case of a work which has been praised by Pound, it has been evident that the praise is for achieving a parallel with Imagist or Poundian concepts, not necessarily for the virtues it was claimed to possess in its own time. In other words, poets are esteemed to the degree in which they put into practice principles similar to those of Pound's. Here we find the balance, which Pound was attempting to create, that actually measures the same qualities in artists from Theocritus to Yeats, regardless of the individual concerns of the age under examination. In this way, all ages come to be viewed contemporaneously. But there is a problem.

The trouble with looking upon all ages as contemporaneous, is the tendency to believe that all values are contemporaneous too. That, in fact, all ages searched for the same methods of expression, and held the same beliefs about poetry, and that if artists did not produce works conforming to the same criteria as Pound's, then they too,

would not be satisfied that they had produced 'good' poetry. Quite obviously, different ages held different beliefs, and while most poets, for instance, might be willing to believe that dedication to the craft was necessary, they might not agree that this implied the need to serve such a determinedly slavish apprenticeship as Pound's

Here, then, is the crux of the matter. If Pound did not believe that the poets of an era were producing good poetry, then they could not have believed it themselves, except through either ignorance or stupidity, (Pound's two most frequent charges). But, of course, poets still kept producing poetry which was not only acclaimed then, but also in Pound's time: the works of Milton, and the Romantics are particularly good examples. As I suggested in Chapter I, Pound must have been aware of this anomaly himself, which may go some way towards explaining the occasional diffidence he displays in condemning outright all poetry that failed to fulfil his demands.

A further difficulty with Pound's concept of tradition is that it does not hold together very well. As we discovered in Chapter II, Pound altered Romantic biographies, (unconsciously or otherwise), in order to suit his own version of the development (or decay) of English tradition. Thus Keats, Pound would have us believe, threw over England and struck out for a new poetic career on the Continent, when in reality, he was simply intending to visit Shelley. And, as we have seen, in this and succeeding chapters, many of Pound's perceptions can be related back either to his

own poetry or to his own circumstances. In other words, there are good grounds for suspecting that Pound is just creating a myth out of literary history in order to justify his own present requirements.

The suspicion is strengthened when we ask how Pound arrived at his conclusions on the authors we have examined. The partial answer is set out in Chapter I, under Pound's method of interpretative detail, which becomes the method of Luminous Detail when applied to literature and not history (3); that is, selecting 'key' facts - or, with literature, poems or phrases - which illuminate the context in which they appear. Needless to say, when this method is adopted, we come very close to a view of the Image in reverse, with an enormous significance attaching to nodal points.

The problem with the method is obvious: how do we know we have found the right details, and how do we know they are capable of conveying a full and accurate interpretation? When we look at Pound's ideas, we see that the method is not quite as successful as he would like us to believe. On what writings, for instance, did he base his view of Keats? We know that he did not read Keats' letters until 1953, because he was openly delighted to find another sympathiser in his dislike of Milton: "Waal, Johnnie Keats has that ONE UP, better print it".(4) A similar query

(3) see Selected Prose pp.12-13 (1912-1913)
(4) H. Meacham The Caged Panther (Twayne 1967) p.201

arises about Coleridge's poetry. Had Pound, perhaps, never read any of it?

If we are to agree that much of Pound's criticism lends itself to a mythic interpretation, then we must ask how he came to hold this particular set of views and no other. We have already discussed Pound's efforts to revive not just the art of poetry, but the conditions necessary for the production of masterpieces; and to him the most crippling drawback was the ingrained amateurism of the English. As Wyndham Lewis reports, "these people were unready ... to have their chronic amateurism exposed"(5), and, as he quotes Pound from Pavannes and Divisions "'it is impossible to talk about perfection without getting yourself much disliked. It is even more difficult in a capital where everybody's Aunt Lucy or Uncle George has written something or other'".(6) This is the basis of the disease, but where it began, or why it began, as we saw, does not seem to be clear even to Pound himself. Certainly the process of decay is aggravated by England's isolation from the Continent during the Napoleonic Wars, but whether this constitutes the beginning is unlikely: Milton alone lived well before the Napoleonic Wars, as we are aware.

How, then, could Pound have come by his views? We have discussed the differences of outlook between Pound and

(5) Wyndham Lewis in An Examination of Ezra Pound ed. P. Russell (New Directions 1950) p.258
(6) ibid. p.260

his contemporaries, from which we can conclude not only that Pound's views are peculiar to him, but also that his contempories considered that he came to hold them by the most unorthodox scholarship. Charles Norman posits the interesting theory that Pound possessed a feminine mind. As he points out, "it is true that the ideas on which he has expended most time and energy - his creative work aside - have been the ideas of others"(7), and in an attempt to explain Pound's reception of second- and third-rate ideas - "corrupting ideas" he cites Pound's extreme susceptibility "to the intellectual and emotional pressures of other men" (8). While it is possible to enumerate some examples of Pound's receptivity, (e.g. Pound's reaction to Madox Ford's roll on the floor, or Beecham on the beauty of Byron's poetry), it is just as easy to think of the enormous influence which Pound had on Eliot, for example. Thus, it seems unlikely that Pound possessed both a masculine and a feminine mind - though perhaps this is an overlooked and nascent possibility.

Finally, we must decide whether or not Pound sees Romanticism as a diseased tradition. When we recall Pound's favourable comment on the energy of the Romantics, the fact that the rot must have set in well before their arrival on the literary scene, as well as their 'flight'

to the Continent, and the many estimable remarks he has to make of their verse, we can only conclude that Romanticism itself was not the cause of the decrepitude of tradition. They were working in a tradition that was already polluted. What we can say is that Pound's concept of recent English tradition was evolved from a knowledge of, and deep concern for, the state of his present circumstances. The Romantics, perhaps, were unable to turn the tide themselves through an ignorance of the necessary techniques which it was left to Pound to discover and implement.

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